

Content Analysis of Public Comments

30-day Comment Period on Francis Marion Prescribed Fire EA

October 11, 2019

The Environmental Assessment for the Prescribed Fire Management for the Francis Marion National Forest project was emailed out to people who had responded during the scoping period for the proposed action. The 30-day comment period ended on September 25, 2019 and four emails from four individuals were received. Below is a summary of their comments and how the Forest Service is responding to those comments. The responses provided herein reference the comment responses completed following scoping for the project, and those responses are incorporated by reference.

John Brubaker: In general, John voiced support for Alternative 3, but felt that more fire is needed to meet the restoration desired conditions for longleaf pine. He expressed concerns that more prescribed fire is needed in MA2, specifically in the area near his home.

Forest Service Response: His support for Alternative 3 is noted and will be considered by the line officer in the decision-making process. This Alternative does include the use of more prescribed fire in MA2, so it does address his concerns on fire in MA2. His request for an increase in the prescribed fire management is already addressed by an alternative considered, but not in detail. This alternative recognizes an ecological need, but also recognizes that there are staffing and fiscal limits and no additional response is needed.

David Strickland: David voiced a general opposition to the proposed action and wants clarification on acreages, timing, intervals and restrictions. He indicated that if this information is not changed, he “would be forced to create a large opposition towards this plan”. He is concerned about the fire management in wilderness, specifically “allow man made fire” into Wilderness areas. He expressed concerns about proper firing indices and damage occurring from current prescribed burning activities. He expressed concern regarding decreasing restrictions for the prescribed burning program.

Forest Service Response: Clarifying language will be added to the EA regarding acres of anticipated treatments within wilderness areas. Rhea Whalen, District Ranger, also communicated with the commenter via telephone to address his concerns. His other concerns were previously addressed by Issue 4 on fire management in Wilderness in the EA and Concerns 1b, 7a, and 23 of the scoping comment analysis, so no additional response is needed.

Tom Dooley on behalf of The Nature Conservancy: Tom voiced a strong support for Alternative 1, including growing season burns, use of prescribed fire in MA2, increased fire management in the Santee Experimental Forest, new fireline construction and maintenance, feedback and reporting loops and allowing prescribed fire to spread into wilderness areas.

Forest Service Response: His support for Alternative 1 will be considered by the line officer in the decision-making process. No additional response is needed.

Wilton Stribling: He voiced strong opposition to the prescribed fire proposal. He claims that a climax forest of longleaf pine occurred on the Francis Marion is “absurd” and that the current fire program is based on “questionable research”. He felt that the current fire management has “little to no regard” for timber value, game management, and soft and hard mast producing hardwoods. He expressed concerns that prescribed fire is conducted to produce “special, low-productivity habitat” for “special species” removing the Forest from timber management. Specifically, he asks for burning in “blocks of hundreds of acres instead of thousands, controlled low intensity fire..., earlier season initiation of burns, and a March 15 cutoff for all but very small burns.”

Forest Service Response: His concerns and opposition will be considered by the line officer. His concerns are addressed by Issues 1 and 3 in the EA and the responses to Concerns 1, 7b and 8 of the scoping comment analysis. No additional response is needed.